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CIA Director Discusses Soviet Active Measures

Distortions, forgeries key to USSR policy

In a September address to the Dallas Council on World Affairs, CIA director William J. Casey outlined the key elements of Soviet "active measures" and told the audience these campaigns will not soon end. "They will shift focus, but we will continue to be confronted by a centrally coordinated, well-funded, and well-staffed overt and covert attempt to manipulate our perceptions and decisions."

Four elements of Soviet "active measures"—aggressive techniques employing forgery, distortion and media manipulation to undermine U.S. policies and protect Soviet interests and the Soviet system—include political influence operations, disinformation, forgeries and front groups.

Mr. Casey described the "political influence operation" which uses respected individuals to spread the Soviet viewpoint through person-to-person contacts. He cited a respected Danish journalist who worked as a clandestine agent of influence of the KGB who was able to persuade more than 50 prominent Danish personalities to sign a newspaper ad supporting a Nordic nuclear-free zone.

"Disinformation" involves planting half-truths, lies and rumors to discredit free world policies or persons. Mr. Casey cited the on-going campaign in India to link the CIA to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Disinformation efforts, Mr. Casey said, are projected and reinforced by media manipulation.

"The Soviets conduct a massive worldwide effort to manipulate foreign media, thus transforming portions of the press into an unwitting propaganda machine," he said. Soviet media manipulation and disinformation benefit from the open character of the Western press. The CIA director noted the case of the attack on the Korean airliner which killed 269 innocent passengers and crew.

"The initial Soviet reaction was to deny that the civilian plane had been shot down. After a period of regrouping while world revulsion mounted, the Soviet government used obscure Western publications to float the disinformation that the Korean airliner was on a US spy mission. This remarkable story was noted by Western media along with the US denial. Then Soviet-controlled media quoted the story, frequently out of context, sourcing it to respected American and West European newspapers. In this way the Soviet Union was able to generate the impression of broad international support for its version of the affair, thereby turning a 'Soviet massacre' into a 'spy plane incident,'" Mr. Casey said.

Forgeries, sometimes of the crudest form, are another widely used active measures technique, according to Mr. Casey. He cited a forged United States Information Agency cable transmitting the text of a speech alleged to have been given by then-UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. The forgery claimed to outline US strategy in the Third World, including support for independence movements in several Indian states and territorial claims by some of India's neighbors. "This proven forgery has, nevertheless, assumed a life of its own and has surfaced again and again . . . and was even cited as providing the motive for the alleged US role in the Gandhi assassination," Mr. Casey said.

The Soviets employ a wide range of organizations as tools in their active measures program. Among these are so-called front organizations which are created and funded by the KGB.

"Today, the largest Soviet 'front organizations' include the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the World Federation of Democratic Youth," Mr. Casey reported. These organizations establish local chapters which act to support Soviet disinformation and media penetration efforts.



William J. Casey
CIA Director

They also provide international forums to create the impression of broad international support for Soviet policies, he noted.

"The effectiveness of the front groups grows out of their pretense not to share communist ideological goals as they attempt to attract members from a broad political spectrum. In fact, many of the rank and file members as well as much of the general public may not be aware of the Soviet influence on the group. When a group such as the International Association of Democratic Lawyers comes forward with a public statement questioning the legality of prosecuting the Bulgarian on trial for complicity in the assassination attempt on the Pope, how many people are aware that they are a Soviet front group responding to direction from Moscow?"

Mr. Casey also outlined the organization and apparatus that supports Soviet active measures programs as well as specific campaigns.

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"The 'neutron bomb' affair was the most successful Soviet dis-information campaign in recent years," Mr. Casey said. "Designed as a reduced-blast, enhanced-radiation artillery projectile, the enhanced-radiation weapon, if deployed, would have rendered useless the overwhelming Soviet and bloc armored force superiority in any West European theater conflict. Once labeled by the Soviets as 'neutron bomb' and the 'ultimate capitalist weapon, that destroys people and leaves buildings intact,' the political cost of this weapon became too high for the NATO allies to sustain."

Building on this success in blocking the modernization of NATO forces, the Soviets next undertook to block any response to their own massive deployment of intermediate-range SS-20 multiple warhead missiles.

"In this, they have enjoyed only partial success. Nevertheless, many now believe that the SS-20 deployments were in reaction to NATO nuclear efforts when, in fact, the truth is exactly the opposite," Mr. Casey said.

The current anti-SDI campaign falls into the same category with news stories and position papers purporting to show that the American SDI program threatens the peaceful use of space.

In his conclusion, Mr. Casey noted that "if people really understand the Soviet use of active measures as a significant instrument of policy, they stand a good chance of not being manipulated."

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